

23rd November 2009  
PRESS RELEASE

## *Ahmadiyya Muslim Jama'at condemns proposed ban on minarets in Switzerland*

### **The minaret is not a political symbol.**

On 29 November 2009 Switzerland will hold a referendum on a proposed constitutional amendment banning the construction of minarets in the country. The Ahmadiyya Muslim Jamaat believes that any such prohibition would be a clear example of religious discrimination and would be a direct breach of Switzerland's obligations under international human rights law.

The referendum is based upon an initial proposal from the Swiss People's Party (SPP) to amend Article 72 of the Constitution by incorporating the sentence '*The construction of minarets is forbidden*'.

The SPP and its supporters assert that rather than being symbols of religious significance, minarets are '*symbols of a religious-political claim to power and dominance which threatens the constitutional rights of others*.' This assertion is completely without foundation.

Traditionally the main purpose of a minaret has been to provide a vantage point for the Muslim call to prayer. The call to prayer can be compared to the ringing of bells from a church tower because both signify the time for worship. However out of respect for the local indigenous population, in most Ahmadi mosques this does not occur and the call to prayer is instead performed from inside the mosque to minimise disturbance to non-Muslims. Nonetheless, the minaret continues to play a role as a key architectural feature of the Islamic faith.

The minaret is not a political symbol or a means to try and dominate society. In all Ahmadi mosques the true Islamic principles of love, peace and tolerance are continually exhorted and practiced. Terrorist attacks continue to be attributed to Islam, yet such attacks are the acts of the misguided and evil; they are nothing to do with Islam. The Holy Qur'an explicitly states that '*There is no compulsion in religion*'.

Speaking ahead of the referendum, Abid Khan, the Press Secretary of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Jamaat said:

***“The provocative nature of the anti-Islamic campaign waged by those behind the proposed ban has been both inflammatory and utterly irresponsible. For example, the poster depicting a burqa-clad woman in front of a thicket of missile shaped minarets rising out of the Swiss flag can only serve to alienate rather than enhance mutual understanding.***

***If minarets were to be banned in Switzerland there is no question that this would be an infringement of the basic human rights of Muslims throughout the country and a direct violation of Articles 18 and 9 of the ICCPR and ECHR respectively, both of which have been ratified by the Swiss Government. Both of these articles guarantee the right to manifest one’s religion.”***

It is of surprise and concern that the issue of banning minarets has raised itself so strongly in a country like Switzerland, which has always had a reputation for peace, tolerance and a lack of prejudice. These are the ideals which are being compromised and threatened by the proposed legislation and thus it is hoped that the people of Switzerland reject the banning of minarets outright in the referendum due to take place on November 29<sup>th</sup>.

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